

COMFORT FROM THE FUTURE

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A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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"Thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away."
Job 11:16

JOB'S misery was extreme, and it seemed as if he could never forget it. He never did forget the fact of it, but he did forget the pain of it. That he had been utterly miserable would always remain recorded upon the tablets of his memory, but the wretchedness itself would not remain. It would be so entirely removed that it should be as a thing that has been altogether forgotten.

Nothing better can happen to our misery than that it should be forgotten in the sense referred to in our text, for then, evidently, it will be clean gone from us. It will be as it is when even the scent of the liquor has gone out of the cask, when even the flavor of the bitter drug lingers no longer in the medicine glass, but has altogether disappeared. So is it with the sorrow that has so effectually gone out of the mind that it is just as though it had never been there.

If anyone here is in misery of any kind—whether it is misery of physical pain, or misery of need, or misery of soul on account of sin, or the loss of the light of God's countenance—I can only pray for you, dear friend, that you may speedily forget your misery, and only remember it as waters that pass away. The thing goes to be done, it is quite possible, and you may expect it. If you look carefully at the connection of our text, and give earnest attention to the matter, I do not doubt that you will experience this blessed forgetfulness.

When we are in pain of body, and depression of spirit, we imagine that we never shall forget such misery as we are enduring. The sharp ploughshare has gone down so deeply that we think it has made a mark in the soul that can never be erased. We seem to lie all broken in pieces, with our thoughts like a case of knives cutting into our spirit, and we say to ourselves, "We never shall forget this terrible experience."

And yet, by and by, God turns toward us the palm of His hand, and we see that it is full of mercy, we are restored to health, or lifted up from depression of spirit, and we wonder that we ever made so much of our former suffering or depression. We remember it no more, except as a thing that has passed and gone, to be recollected with gratitude that we have been delivered from it, but not to be remembered so as to leave any scar upon our spirit, or to cause us any painful reflection whatsoever. "Thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away."

I. I am not going to limit the application of the text to Job and his friends, for it also has a message for many of us at the present time, and I shall take it, first, WITH REFERENCE TO THE COMMON TROUBLES OF LIFE WHICH AFFECT BELIEVING MEN AND WOMEN.

These troubles of life happen to us all more or less. They come to one in one shape, and perhaps he thinks that he is the only man who has any real misery, yet they also come to others, though possibly in another form. There is certainly a cross for every shoulder to bear, Simon must not bear the cross alone, and all the rest go free.

There is no road to heaven without its stones, or without its Hill Difficulty, and I think that there are few pilgrims from the City of Destruction who get to the Celestial City without passing through the Valley of Death-shade, and having to fight with giants and even with Apollyon himself. Cowper truly wrote—

***The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."***

There is much joy in true religion. Wisdom's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is everyone that retains her." But still, notwithstanding the joy, and in addition to it, there is sorrow, there is misery lurking close by the believer's pathway, and it is always ready to pounce upon him somewhere between here and heaven. The Lord of the pilgrims was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," and His disciples must expect to fare even as their Master fared while here below, it is enough for the servant if he is as his Lord.

You, dear friends, who are just now enduring misery, should seek to be comforted under it. Perhaps you will ask me, "Where can we get any comfort?" Well, if you cannot draw any from your present experience, seek to gather some from the past. You have been miserable before, but you have been delivered and helped. There has come to you a most substantial benefit from everything which you have been called to endure.

You must be conscious that when you think of your troubles, you can say, with Hezekiah, "O LORD, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live." Or you can say, with the psalmist, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word."

I believe that very often, God sends His very choicest love tokens to us in black edged envelopes, and many a time has it happened that the great rumbling wagons of tribulation have been those which have brought the heaviest weight of treasure to the doors of the saints. Do we ever learn much without the rod? I fear we do not, most of us are quickest learners, I think, when we smart the most. Well then, if affliction has been profitable in the past, let us rest assured that it will be so in the future.

Let us gather consolation also from the future. If, as the apostle truly says, "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous," recollect how he goes on to say, "Nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." I have been trying to ring the changes on those two words, during the last few weeks, while I have been laid aside by illness, "nevertheless afterward"—"nevertheless afterward"—"nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

The apostle James tells us that "the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience for it, until he receives the early and latter rain." He does not complain because his corn is buried under the clods, and covered with the snow, but he lives upon hope, and rejoices in the future harvest, pleading the promise, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

In your own case, dear friend, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, what will happen in the future? For it is with that I would comfort you at this time. Why, this is what will happen, "Thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away." How will that be?

Well first, *by the lapse of time*. Time is a wonderful healer. Hearts that seem as if they must break when first the trial comes, at last grow quite used to it. Look through the veil of a few minutes, gaze through the longer vista of a few years, and that which seemed dark as tempest wears quite another aspect. Oh, if you, whose hearts seem now almost ready to burst, could but project yourselves only six months ahead, if you could leap forward a year, and then look back, probably even in that time you would almost have forgotten your misery.

Ay, but there is something better than the lapse of years, and that is when, *during a considerable time, you are left without trial*. That is a sharp pain you are now enduring, but what if you should have years of health afterwards? Then you will forget your misery. That is a sad loss which you have been called to suffer, it seems to you to be a crushing disaster, but what if it should be succeeded by years of prosperity? Remember how Job forgot his misery when, in a short time, he had double as much of all

that he possessed as he had before. He had back twice the amount of all his former wealth, he had again a smiling family around him, so he might well forget his misery. Year after year, and perhaps, even to his death—it was so as far as we know—Job was again a man who had a hedge made round about him and all that he had, and in the happiness of his later life he might well forget his former misery.

Well now, it is very likely to be so with you after you get through this present struggle, therefore, keep your heart up, believe in God, have confidence in Him, and all shall be well. There is wonderfully smooth sailing on ahead for some of you when you are once over this little stretch of broken water. If you can safely pass over this stony portion of the road, it will be good traveling for you all the way to heaven. Recollect that the horses' heads are towards home, you are journeying to your Father's house, so be of good courage, for you shall forget your misery, and only remember it as waters that pass away.

And besides the lapse of time, and an interval of rest and calm, it may be—it probably is the fact with God's people—that *He has in store for you some great mercies*. When the Lord turns your captivity, you will be like them that dream, and you know what happens to men who dream. They wake up, their dream is all gone, they have completely forgotten it. So will it be with your sorrow. Through God's goodness, you will seem suddenly to wake up out of a dreary dream, and then you will begin to laugh, and soon your mouth will be filled with laughter. You will almost despise your former depression of spirit, and when you see the abundant mercy of God toward you, all your misery shall seem like a dream that has gone, a vision of the night—unsubstantial, unreal—that has melted into nothingness.

Some of you have no idea what is reserved for you, you would not be weeping, but laughing, if you did know what God has in store for you—I mean, even here below. It is good for us not to be able to read the roll closed by the hand of God, but we may be sure that there are such blessed things in it concerning our future that each believer may well say, "I will not be bowed down by the trials of the present, but my spirit shall rejoice in God, who doeth for me what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and what my heart hath never conceived."

Be of good courage, brother, sister, in these dark, dull times, for perhaps, this text is God's message to your soul, "Thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away." It has been so with many, many, many believers in the past. What do you think of Joseph sold for a slave, Joseph falsely accused, Joseph shut up in prison? But when Joseph found out that all that trial was the way to make him ruler over all the land of Egypt, and that he might be the means of saving other nations from famine, and blessing his father's house, I do not wonder that he called his elder son "Manasseh." What does that name mean? "Forgetfulness"—"for God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house."

Why, sitting on the throne there, feeding the nation, and blessing his father and his brethren, he must have thought that the being cast into the pit, and being sold to the Ishmaelites, and being put into prison, was not worth recollecting, except for gratitude to God that it ever happened as a means to the grand end of helping him up into that position of usefulness.

And Joseph is not the only one who has had such an experience as that. Read the Scriptures through, and you will find that those whom God has called and anointed to eminent service have been put, like the blades of Damascus, into the fire, and drawn through the fire again and again, that in the day of battle they might strike on the northern iron and steel, and yet not turn their edge. These servants of the Lord have been prepared for an immortal destiny by desperate griefs, and—

"The deeper their sorrows, the louder they'll sing."

As a woman remembers no more her travail, for joy that a man is born into the world, so has it happened to the believer in the time of his sorrow, he has forgotten it, cast it all away, because of the greater joy which God has brought out of it. Jabez is the child of sorrow, but he is therefore more honorable than his brethren. The more stormy the sea, the sweeter the haven. The rougher the road on earth, the better the rest above. So, poor tried child of God, believe that this text is intended to be a

divine message of comfort to your heart, "Thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away."

Thus much on the first head.

II. I should be greatly rejoiced if, in the second place, I might speak A CHEERING WORD TO POOR SOULS UNDER DISTRESS ON ACCOUNT OF SIN.

I mean you who long to be saved, yet cannot understand how it is to come to pass, or who, understanding the plan of salvation, are somehow unable to appropriate it to yourselves. You feel as if you have your eyes bandaged, and your feet fast fixed in the stocks, so that you cannot go to Christ, and cannot even look to Christ, and therefore your souls are full of sorrow.

I want you, dear friends, especially to notice what Zophar recommends to a man who has sin upon him. Read the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth, verses of this chapter, "If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him; if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in your tabernacles. For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be steadfast, and shalt not fear: because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away."

I recommend these words to you also, only I have something even better to recommend to you. Does any man here say, "I cannot get peace with God, I am full of misery on account of sin?" I know all about you, friend, I have gone that road, long ago. I have been splashed up to my very eyes in the mire of the Slough of Despond, and I sometimes get a little of its mud in my eyes even now.

Well now, I exhort you, first of all, to *look to Christ, and lean on Christ*. Trust in His atoning sacrifice, for there alone can a troubled soul find rest. If you say that somehow you cannot get peace, then I shall have to ask you to see whether, perhaps, sin may not be lying at the door. To use Zophar's expression, have you prepared your heart? Have you gone to Christ with your whole heart and soul? Have you sought Him with all your might? I hope you realize that repentance and faith are very bad things to play with, for such play will damn a man's soul. These are things to be earnestly used in a most solemn undertaking. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence" in this matter. We can neither repent nor believe with half our heart, it is our whole soul that is required if salvation is to be ours.

Now, have you sought the Lord with all thy heart? If you have, you will surely find Him. I am certain that you will, and then afterwards, "thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away." There was never a man yet who, with all his heart, did seek the Lord Jesus Christ, but sooner or later found Him, and if you have been long in seeking, I lay it to the fact that you have not sought with a prepared heart, a thoroughly earnest heart, or else you would have found Him.

But perhaps, taking Zophar's next expression, you have not stretched out your hands toward the Lord, giving yourself up to Him like a man who holds up his hands to show that he surrenders. You must come and say, "My opposition is all over, I have no quarrel now with God, I yield unconditionally to Him." The word may refer to one who stretches out his hands to grasp whatever may come from God within his reach. He stretches out his empty hands, asking to have them filled, stretches out his entreating hands, pleading that God will bless him. Well now, if you have done that, you shall get a blessing.

Further, you may and you shall forget your misery, provided you fulfill one more condition mentioned by Zophar, and that is, that you are not harboring any sin, "If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles." There is an old-fashioned grace that I am never ashamed to preach, though some, who call themselves evangelists, have folded it up, and put it away in the back cupboard, they never mention this old-fashioned grace, which is called repentance.

Now, I learn from the Scriptures that repentance is just as necessary to salvation as faith is, and the faith that has not repentance going with it will have to be repented of one of these days. A dry-eyed faith is a faith that will save no man. Peter's message was, "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out," and our Lord's own declaration was, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." He began His public ministry by crying, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel," which means just

this, that if any man is living in sin, it is no use his praying, or pretending to believe, until he gives up that sin. If there is any passion that you are indulging, any lust that is your master—if you are carrying on a wicked business—if you are living in willful transgression of God's law, Christ can save you from your sins, but even Christ cannot save you in your sins.

If you will have your sin, you must be lost, so stands God's decree. Christ must, by His grace, separate you from your sin, or else you will be separated from Him forever. I want this to be a very heart searching word, and therefore, I say to any miserable man or miserable woman here—You shall forget your misery if you give up your sin, and trust in the sin-atonishing Savior. Come, friend, you shall not say that I am flattering you, for I tell you plainly that you must flee for your life from the dearest sin that now lays hold upon you."

"Oh!" you say, "but how am I to do it?" Christ will help you. Trust Him to help you. But if you say, "I will trust Him to save me," and yet continue to live in sin, He will not save you. That is not the salvation that we preach, we proclaim salvation from sin, for that is the salvation which Jesus came to bring to us. You must, as Zophar said to Job, put your iniquity far away, and you must not let wickedness dwell in your tabernacles, that is to say, in your tents, in your houses.

I know some men, who will never get peace of conscience, and rest of heart, while they let their wives live as they do live, and while they allow their children to live as they do live. Some of you will not find mercy for yourselves while you neglect your children's highest welfare as you do. I know some men—I hope they are good men, but certainly they are not good fathers. They are so peaceful, and gentle, that they never like to utter a word of reproof, their boys and girls may go where they like—I might almost say that they may go to the devil if they like—yet their father has not a word to say to them, do you call that proper conduct for a professedly Christian man?

There are some parents, who allow their children to do such things that God is grieved with them for their children's sakes, and they will never get peace of mind till they set their house in order. What! is God coming to live where there is no family prayer, where there is no care for His name or His day, where there is no rebuke of open sin? It has filled me with unspeakable sorrow when I have heard of Christian parents whose boys swear, and whose girls are allowed to go where, if they are not ruined, body and soul, it is little short of a miracle.

Oh, do see that you let not wickedness dwell in your tabernacles, you who are the people of God, and you who wish to be His, if you would have Zophar's words to Job fulfilled in your experience, "Then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be steadfast, and shalt not fear: because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away."

III. Now let me tell you HOW SWEETLY GOD CAN MAKE A SINNER FORGET HIS MISERY.

The moment a sinner believes in Jesus Christ with true heart and repentant spirit, God makes him forget his misery, first, *by giving him a full pardon*. All his sin is forgiven, and therefore he feels ready to dance for joy, and he soon forgets his misery. By faith, he gets a sight of the great pardoning Lord, and of His atoning blood. He sees the Son of God suffering and dying for him on the tree, and he is overjoyed at the revelation of such a wondrous redemption. He claps his hands, and he forgets his misery.

Next, *he rejoices in all the blessings that God gives with His grace*. He reads that those whom Christ has pardoned "are justified from all things," from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. He learns that they are clothed with the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness, and he forgets his own nakedness while he rejoices that he is so wondrously clothed. He feeds on the bread of heaven, and forgets his former hunger. He drinks of the water of life, and forgets his previous pangs of thirst.

He enjoys the liberty of the sons of God, and he forgets the chains he used to wear as Satan's slave. He has peace with God, and he forgets the trouble that was such a burden on his heart. He is so full of joy that there is no room for sorrow, and if, perchance, the tear of repentance still lingers in his eye, it is not sullen but sweet sorrow, and the tear glistens in the sunlight of God's countenance like the diamond, or like some choice pearl that slumbers in its shell.

Oh, beloved, if you will but come to Christ, and leave your sin, whatever your misery is, you shall forget it, or if you do recollect it at all, it shall only be to remember it as the snow that has melted and vanished, or as the rain that has soaked into the earth, "as waters that pass away."

Now, dear friends, all that I have been saying to the sinner is quite as applicable to every backsliding child of God. It may be that some of you who are here are Christians—that is, you have trusted in Christ to save you—but you have got into a very sad state of heart. You have not half the spiritual life that you once had, and therefore you do not glorify God as you once did.

It is most grievous to think how many professing Christians live at a poor dying rate, they seem to be just alive, or hardly that. Well, dear brother or sister, if you have become miserable, I am rather glad that you have. That is part of the way towards a better state of things. When a man cannot be happy in a backsliding state, he will soon seek to get out of it. The smart is a part of the cure. Solomon says, "The blueness of a wound cleanses away evil," and the chastisement which follows sin is often for the healing of the sinner.

IV. I will bring my discourse to a close with this last reflection. **THIS TEXT WILL COME TRUE TO THE SICKENING, DECLINING, SOON-DEPARTING BELIEVER.**

Ah! dear friend, when you first found out that the complaint from which you are suffering really was consumption, what a chill seemed to come over everything! When the physician said to you, very tenderly but very faithfully, "I fear I cannot do much for you. I can perhaps give you a little relief, but I dare not deceive you, for you have an incurable disease,"—then, although you are a child of God, you endured a great deal of misery, and spent many long, sleepless nights looking forward to you scarcely knew what.

Are you still in that state, my dear sister? As you get worse and worse, do your spirits continue to sink? My dear brother, as you gradually fade away, does the light seem to fade, too? Well then, listen. If you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you are resting alone upon Him, recollect that, in a very short time, "thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away." In a very, very, very short time, your suffering and sadness will all be over.

I suppose the expression, "waters that pass away," signifies those rivers which are common in the East, and which we meet with so abundantly in the South of France. They are rivers with very broad channels, but I have often looked in vain for a single drop of water in them. "Then," perhaps you ask, "what is the use of such rivers?"

Well, at certain times, the mountain torrents come rushing down, bearing great rocks, and stones, and trees before them, and then, after they have surged along the riverbed for several days, they altogether disappear in the sea. Such will all the sorrows of life and the sorrows even of death soon be to you, dear friend, and to me also. They will all have passed away, and all will be over with us here. The passage to the grave may be sharp, but it must be short.

*"The road may be rough, but it cannot be long,
So I'll smooth it with hope, and cheer it with song."*

And then, you know, dear friends, those waters that have passed away will never come back again. Water that is spilt upon the ground can never be gathered up again, and it is one of the charms of the heavenly world that our sorrows will never reach us there. No more poverty, no more cold, no more heat, no more sin, no more depression of spirits, no more pain, no more forsaking of friends, no more sorrow of any kind, for "the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

That is a very beautiful expression, "Sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Here, they keep clinging to us, one on one arm, and the other on the other arm. Sorrow and sighing will come with us wherever we go, and we sometimes say to them, "Now, you might go somewhere else, for we do not want you,"

yet they still hold fast to us, but when we get up to the golden gate, no sooner shall the light eternal flash on our eyes than we shall look in vain for our old companions, for they will be gone. "Sorrow and sighing shall flee away," and lest there should be any trace of their mournful companionship left, we are expressly told that "God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Thank God, we shall recollect our sorrows in heaven only to praise God for the grace that sustained us under them, but we shall not remember them as a person does who has cut his finger and who still bears the scar in his flesh. We shall not recollect them as one does who has been wounded, and who carries the bullet somewhere about him. In heaven, you shall not have a trace of earth's sorrow, you shall not have, in your glorified body, or in your perfectly sanctified soul and spirit, any trace of any spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing that shall show that you ever had a pang on earth, or even that you ever committed a sin.

Some diseases, you know, leave marks on our hands or faces, so that we say to our friends, "Do you see that lump? It was a time of terrible pain that brought that up, and I fear it will not go away." Ah! but in heaven, there will be no trace of anything like pain or sorrow of any sort. All sorrow and suffering shall be gone, and we shall forget our misery, or only remember it as waters that have passed away, never to come back again.

This is the sum and substance of all that I have been trying to say to you, "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord." Christian men do not live on the comforts of this world, their inheritance is on the other side of Jordan. If you are like Esau, and can be content with red pottage, well, you may have it, but you will lose the birthright if you do not prize it. But if you are God's true Jacob, you will gladly give up the pottage to get the promise of the future inheritance.

Oh, what a blessed thing is the faith that enables the soul to postpone the present in order to obtain that blessed future! For what is the present after all, but a fleeting show, an empty dream? But the future is eternal and incorruptible, reserved in heaven at the right hand of God, where there are pleasures forevermore.

Now that, by God's mercy, I find myself again in your midst after a season of sore suffering, I desire to forget my miseries—and some of them have been very sharp ones. I am so glad to be here again, to see you all, and I pray that it may be a long time before I am deprived of the great privilege of speaking to you in the name of the Lord.

I bless God tonight, and praise His name in the great congregation, and I ask for every brother and sister that when your time of misery comes, you may be brought through it all, and come out of the big end of the horn, rejoicing in the cornucopia of God's bounty and blessedness, and praising His name, as I do at this time with all my heart. Oh, may every one of you find this text to be true to you, "Thou shalt forget your misery, and remember it as waters that pass away"!

The blessing of the Lord be with you all forevermore! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JOB 11

The words we are about to read were spoken by one of Job's three friends—or what if I call them his three tormentors? These men did not speak wisely, and their argument was not altogether sound, but for all that, in the instance before us, Zophar the Naamathite spoke that which was truthful. Although he made a great mistake in turning it against Job, yet what he said was in the main correct, and we may learn from it as we read it.

Remember, dear friends, that whenever you read the words of these three men, you must take them with a good many grains of salt. They are not to be accepted as if they were God's Word, because they

are not. Those three men were mistaken in many points, yet very much of what they said was weighty and valuable, and is still worthy of our careful consideration.

Verses 1-3. *Then answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said, Should not the multitude of words be answered? and should a man full of talk be justified? Should thy lies make men hold their peace? and when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed?*

This was a very bitter and cruel speech, and Zophar was not using the language of friendship, or even of common courtesy. First, he charged Job with being a great talker, “a man full of talk.” No doubt Job did speak well and eloquently, but to retort upon him that he was a man abundant in words, was a very cruel thing, especially when he was in such a condition of distress and suffering.

Yet, dear friends, it is an evil thing to be men of tongue, and not of hand, it is a dreadful thing to be men—or for the matter of that, women either—who are “full of talk,” and therefore have no room for anything else. There are some people who seem to think that simply by their volubility, they can carry all before them! In such a case, we may say with Zophar, “Should not the multitude of words be answered? and should a man full of talk be justified?”

But he went beyond these questions, and charged Job with downright lying because he had pleaded his own innocence, “Should thy lies make men hold their peace?” Zophar also insinuated that Job fumed and frothed, as it were, and spoke folly, which he certainly did not do, for he spoke in solemn, sober earnest if ever a man did.

4. For thou hast said, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in thine eyes.

Job did not say that, at least, he did not say it in so many words. He did endeavor to prove his own innocence of the false charges that were brought against him, but he never said that he was clean in God’s eyes.

5-6. But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee; and that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is!

Oh, that God would enable you, dear friends, to see your sin, and make you perceive that there is a double meaning in His law—a deep, underlying, spiritual meaning, as well as that which is apparent on the surface, so that a man may be guilty of transgression even when he thinks it is not so! Oh, that God would unveil the secrets of His wisdom so as to make you see that He is wiser than all His works, that His hidden wisdom is double that which you have been able to perceive in nature, or in providence, and infinitely greater than He has ever made it appear before men’s eyes.

6. Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.

That was a hard thing for Zophar to say to Job, but still, it was true, and it is true in the case of all of us, “He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.”

Even when a man sits down among the ashes, robbed of all his property, and bereaved of all his children, and when he has to scrape himself with a potsherd because of his many sore boils, even then it may be truly said to him, “God exacteth of thee less than your iniquity deserves.”

7. Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?

What wonderful questions these are! How they ought to convict those who glibly talk of God as if they could measure Him with a foot rule, and understood exactly what He ought to do and ought to be. We are constantly meeting with statements that such and such a thing, which is revealed in Scripture, cannot be true, because it is inconsistent with the modern idea of the benevolence of God. Our only answer to the quibbler is, “Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?”

8-9. It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.

God is incomprehensible by any finite mind, and He is omnipotent too.

10. If he cut off, and shut up, or gather together, then who can hinder him?

If He sees fit to destroy men, or for a while to make them prisoners, or if He pleases to gather them together, and multiply them like the hosts of heaven, who can hinder Him?

11. *For he knoweth vain men: he seeth wickedness also; will he not then consider it?*

Wickedness hidden under the veil of night, God sees as clearly as in the blaze of noon. Wickedness which never comes out of the heart, but tarries there, and does not lead into overt action, God sees it, "Will he not then consider it?" Of course He will.

12. *For vain man—*

That is just what man is by nature, the best of men are vanity—emptiness, "For vain man"—

12. *Would be wise,—*

He pretends to wisdom, he wishes to be thought wise, he likes to wear a wise man's title, "Vain man would be wise,"—

12. *Though man be born like a wild ass's colt.*

As untamed, as ignorant, as willful as a wild ass's colt, are we by nature. Zophar seems to think that he has sufficiently rebuked Job for pretending to be wise, and for complaining that God was dealing unjustly with him, so now he begins to admonish him to repent:—

13-18. *If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him; if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles. For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be steadfast, and shalt not fear: because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away: and thine age shall be clearer than the noonday; thou shalt shine forth, thou shalt be as the morning. And thou shalt be secure, because there is hope; yea, thou shalt dig about thee, and thou shalt take thy rest in safety.*

It is a great mercy when God enables men to pursue their daily callings and to take their nightly rest in safety, and it is a still greater mercy when they feel secure, whether they live or die, because they have a good hope concerning the hereafter. It is an unspeakable blessing when sin is washed away, and a man can lift up his face to God without spot, and walk in the light of JEHOVAH's countenance all the day long.

19-20. *Also thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid; yea, many shall make suit unto thee. But the eyes of the wicked shall fail,—*

Carefully notice this very solemn prophecy—the eyes that have looked upon sin with pleasure—the eyes that have flashed with lascivious desire—the eyes that have dared to look towards God with defiance or derision—"the eyes of the wicked shall fail,"—

20. *And they shall not escape,—*

To what place could they escape from God, when He is everywhere? During the days when the Roman Empire extended all over the world, people said that the whole earth was one great prison for Caesar's enemies, and the universe itself is a vast prison for those who are condemned of God. Where shall they go to avoid arrest? Where shall they fly to get beyond God's reach? They cannot escape anywhere. There is neither hole nor corner, even in the bowels of the mountains, or in the flinty hearts of the rocks, where a sinner can hide himself from the hand of God, "They shall not escape,"—

20. *And their hope—*

The last thing that ever dies, "their hope"—

20. *Shall be as the giving up of the ghost.*

Like death itself, their hope shall be. Then, if "their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost," what hope is there for them? Let us not have our portion with them, else we shall be as hopeless as they are.

**HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—30, 595, 683
AND FROM "FLOWERS AND FRUITS"—14**

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.